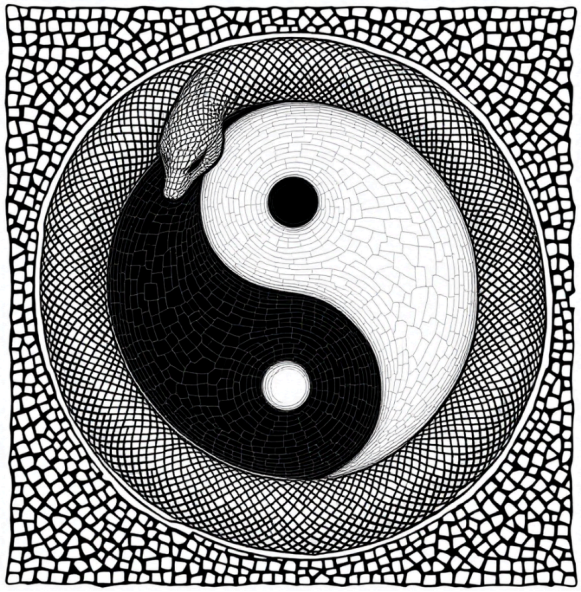
Lifeism: The Art of Nothing

"Choose your own conceptions of everything to do things the Wright way" - DWDW



August 19th, 2026

"Death is completely safe; it's like taking off a tight shoe." - Ram Dass

"To enter through the doorway into the unknown, whether dead or alive, the one rule is: shoes off." - DW

I am writing this simply to help anyone on their path to the end of suffering. My goal is definitely not to reinvent the wheel, it is simply to turn the Wheel of the Dharma to share truths as the Buddha intended through expedient means: making teachings accessible and easy to swallow. Despite focusing centrally on the teachings of Buddhism as the path, there are many paths leading to the same arrival, therefore, I am not attempting to convince anyone of anything. Rather,

> "It is all one, it's all the same trip."

For this reason, I will quote or paraphrase some of the most exceptional human beings of history. Some of which you may have never heard, others are a household name.

In this life, we all have goals. To reach your goals, all you must do is just *make good choices about how you view and interact with the world.* Always. This is much more difficult than it sounds and I surely do not have all the answers. And I am not saying always make safe choices or what people tell you are the right choices. Bad decisions make good stories too. It is all about how you learn to live and live and learn.

This involves more than just making decisions, picking options, or physically doing things like going to school or work. 99% or perhaps even 99.9% of the *"choices"* you can make all have to do with the mind:

"How do you view & interact with the world?" - DW

As understood through the *Noble Eightfold Path* of Buddhism, you must have the:

1. *Right View*
2. *Right Intention*
3. *Right Speech*
4. *Right Action*
5. *Right Livelihood*
6. *Right Effort*
7. *Right Mindfulness*
8. *Right Concentration*

And to end your own suffering, you must recognize that birth, life, death, and everything that comes in between is suffering throughout the "*good*" times and the "*bad*" times.

Now that you recognize that *all is suffering*, you must embrace this human experience through a positive framework:

Unlike how "*positive thinking*" is often understood as the opposite of "*negative thinking,*" this is not the meaning I am using. Rather I am using the term "*positive"* in contrast to "*normative."* Positive thinking is simply experiencing "*what is"* and not "*what should/could/would be*." By attaching normative values to everything in life, we are simply creating our own suffering. By viewing and interacting with the world through a positive lens, living in the "*what is*," we are able to become unattached to that which we cannot control.

In *the Bhagavad Gita*, an ancient Hindu text, *Krishna*, the god of love, compassion, protection, and divine joy who essentially represents the Universe, famously said:

"*Do what you must do but dedicate the fruits of your actions to me.*" - *Bhagavad Gita*

This essentially means: As a human living in this world, one must perform their required duties completely and with focus, always placing full attention and awareness on what is in front of them while fully releasing any personal attachment to the rewards or outcomes of that work.

For example: say that you've been working towards getting your dream job for years and after 3 rounds of interviews and 2 weeks of waiting to hear back, you receive the email:

"*We were very impressed with your experience; however, we have decided to move forward with another candidate whose qualifications are a closer match for our current needs.*"

Ouch. Your heart sinks into your chest and you feel like everything you've done leading up to this moment has been a waste. That is wrong: every second of every day of your life has led to where you are now and where you are going. You already did your best, what is there to regret? Why stay hung up for longer? Will stressing and worrying help you reach your goal, whatever it may be? Of course it will not, stress and worrying will only take you away from the present moment and make it harder for you to do what you truly want.

"*What's the use in worrying? What's the use in hurrying?*" - Dave Matthews

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Now that you understand that your mind is what is causing your own suffering in this life, we will now turn to understanding the root causes of suffering: *ignorance, attachment, and aversion*.

"Ignorance" is a word that we hear often as an insult. In this case, I am using the word "ignorance" in a positive way (as compared to normatively) to simply mean: not understanding the true nature of things; in other words, "ignorance" is simply not knowing the truth of "what is." In the material world, we are all deeply ignorant and are even ignorant of our own ignorance.

"Attachment" simply means clinging. This can be clinging to your thoughts, clinging to your material possessions, clinging to your past, present, or future, clinging to your idea of self or Ego, clinging to your conception of how you are perceived by others, or even clinging to other humans or institutions around you.

"*Aversion*" means trying to avoid things that you don't like or don't want to happen. To return to the previous example, you could say that the subject has an aversion to not getting a job, has an aversion to being unemployed, or has an aversion to being perceived as a failure by his peers, parents, friends, or others.

Now, you might be saying, well of course he doesn't wanna get turned down for the job offer. Yes, of course, that is correct. That is why the subject likely researched, practiced, and prepared for their interview and showed up on time dressed professionally to make a good first impression and put their best foot forward. However, that is all in the past, you are here and it is now. To not want something to happen that has already happened is a perfect example of ignorance, attachment, and aversion all working together to create loads of suffering. To dwell in the past or to feel nervous, stressed, anxious, or scared about the future is simply a waste of time, energy, effort, and your life.

To further articulate, there is an ancient Buddhist parable on the difference between "*pain*" and "*suffering*;" two words that are often used interchangeably in the West. This metaphor known as "*The Parable of the Second Arrow*" is as follows:

> *"Once a man ventured into a forest and he was struck with an arrow of a Hunter. He was hurt in the arm and he started to bleed. The hunter panicked and ran away. The injured man looked around for help but there was no one to help him. He started worrying — Will I survive?; There has been so much blood loss, will I lose my arm?; How will my family survive after I die? and so on and so forth goes the story.*
>
> *Now, did the hunter dodge the second arrow? Did you even notice the second arrow?*
>
> *No? — Well the first arrow was the real arrow shot by the Hunter and the second arrow was self-inflicted by the injured man through his worries. The pain from the first arrow is inevitable and inescapable but the pain and suffering from the second arrow is hugely conditional on your mind and how you react to the changes of life."*

In this sense, pain is inevitable and is an inherent part of life, while suffering (*the second arrow*) comes from within. The stress, worrying, and anxiety are all avoidable with years of practice, dedication, reflection, introspection, understanding, learning, and growing; we all know this doesn't happen overnight.

Now, to live in this way of "*positive*" thinking instead of "*normative*" thinking, you must always remember & embody your answers to the next 2 questions that changed my life:

Where are you?

I am *HERE*.

When is it?

It is *NOW.*

Once you realize that from birth to death, no matter where you are or what day, week, month, year and time it is, you are always *HERE* and it is always *NOW,* the doorway to understanding opens.

If you can learn to always truly embrace the present moment, you will always have a sense of being content and satisfied throughout the "*good times*" and "*bad times*," the ups and downs of life. By always being here now, you can simply sit in the eternal present with immovable and uncompromisable joy.

This concept of "*BE HERE NOW"* is thoroughly explained in a book of the underlined title written by the late former Harvard Psychologist, Richard Alpert, better known by his chosen name, Ram Dass, which means to serve Ram (God).

Now that I've already used the G-word twice, God, I must digress. To restate the subheading of this text, *"Choose your own conceptions of everything."* I cannot stress this enough: to follow the path to the end of suffering, you do not need to believe in God, or a god, or even an external higher power of any form that is outside of your own form.

The rational scientific mind is perfectly capable of believing in the unwritten and ever present laws of the Universe as explained by Issac Newton, Albert Einstein, and others.

Instead of worshiping a god, Buddhists focus on using the mind as a means to end the suffering of the external world to end their own suffering. Furthermore, the higher power that Buddhists believe in is the concept of *"karma"* and "*The twelve links of dependent origination*" (called *nidānas* in sanskrit) in Buddhism. Together,

these form a chain of cause and effect. This essentially explains how us living beings stay trapped in the endless cycle of suffering, death, and rebirth (*samsara* in sanskrit).

In addition to this, the concept of "*Buddha Nature*" is central to Buddhist spirituality. Essentially, it is the idea that the spirit and wisdom or higher power of the Buddha is already within us all. An analogy to explain this concept is as follows:

> *"Buddha Nature is like a fruit seed that is planted within the soil of your being. With patience, food, water, sunlight, and all of the right conditions and circumstances, this seed will grow into a large tree and bear fruits to feed others.*
>
> *In the same way, through patience, food, water, sunlight, and all of the right conditions and circumstances, as well as the right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration, a being is able to cultivate their Buddha Nature to serve others and feed their minds."*

In one of the most life changing books ever written, "The Big Book," Bill W., the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) recounts one of his lowest points of rock bottom in which his friend gave him the advice I am giving you now:

> *"My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, 'Why don't you choose your own conception of God?' That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last." - Bill W.*

So now I must repeat this once again: if you do choose to believe in God or a higher power, simply choose whatever that means to you. Your higher power can be the love and compassion of your closest friends or that of your grandmother. For me, God is love and God is hate, God is everything, and at the same time, God is within the deepest depths of emptiness or nothingness, but most importantly, for me, mother nature is God and so is the entire Universe including everything in it.

To explain this notion, I turn to the words of Jesús Cristo:

> "*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to know the difference." - Psalm 139:23-24*

Now, based on your conception of a higher power, replace the word "*God"* with that higher power. For example, if you see your higher power to be Mother Nature, simply replace "God" with Mother Nature.

> "*[Mother Nature,] grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to know the difference." - DW*

As said by the Stoic Philosopher and 2nd Century Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius famously said:

> "You have power over your mind - not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength."
>
> - Marcus Aurelius

Once you can recognize this higher power in other human beings and you can see it within yourself, it becomes clear that the Universe made you exactly as the Universe intended to make you. You are perfectly perfect. You are unique, just like everyone else. All you can control is your mind and how you choose to live.

"You can't connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect them looking backwards… You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever - because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path."

- Steve Jobs

In a similar vein, my favorite visual artist, David Choe, the creator of "Thumbs Up America," "The DVDASA Podcast," and the Facebook graffiti mural that he painted in 2005, which led him to become the world's richest artist, once famously said:

> *"Have the courage to follow your own instincts and create your own path."*
>
> *"Be brave enough to dream big and work hard to make it a reality."*
>
> *"The greatest risk in life is not taking any risks at all." - David Choe*

Furthermore, given that this higher power is within us all, we must embrace it while not becoming attached to it. This is commonly known as avoiding the *"Ego Trap."* Once you realize that we all have the option to embrace and trust our higher power that is within us, we must be VERY VERY careful. If you let your spiritual journey feed your Ego, you are doomed to fail repeatedly.

To revisit the "tight *shoe analogy*" introduced on the title page, we must understand what the tight shoe represents. If this is not already clear, the tight shoe represents the "*Ego*." The "*Ego*" is centered around our understanding of self, how we perceive our self image, and our understanding and clinging to the idea of somebodyness: I am a man/woman, I am this many years old, I went to this school, I have worked for X many years at Y company, I like this, I don't like this, this is me, you are you. All of these notions and preferences are attachments that are derived from the inherent ignorance of human kind.

As said by Ram Dass:

> *"You went into somebody training when you took birth, and you ended up somebody. I bet you think you're real. I really think you think you've got a personal history; you think you're going somewhere; you think you've got problems and neuroses and hopes and relationships; it all sounds [absolutely] real doesn't it? … Boy were you taken for a ride." - Ram Dass*

Through both "*awakening / enlightenment / nirvana"* as well as through dying we leave our body and "*Ego*" and conceptions of "*somebodyness*" at the door and enter into the unknown: whatever may lay on the other side, no one knows for certain.

"*All I know is that I know nothing." - Socrates*

"I know I have to go away." - Cat Stevens

"Lord, my body has been a good friend, but I won't need it when I reach the end." - Cat Stevens

I do not know what happens after death, nor do I claim to. To claim that you know the truth for certain is a fool's game to play.

To say that when you die, you must leave your physical body, "*Ego*," and "*somebodyness"* behind seems to be an agreed upon notion. But who really knows what comes next once you leave your shoes by the door?

Heaven, Hell, Paradise, Eternal Separation, Afterlife, Rebirth/Reincarnation, Nirvana, Liberation, Union with one's higher power, Universal Consciousness, Eternal Consciousness, the 6 Realms of Existence, a Dream Realm, Reuniting with the larger "self," or perhaps even reliving your entire life again eternally. Who knows?

In Buddhism, the path to Awakening involves stripping away the layers of the Ego, relinquishing desires and attachments, letting go of your preferences, and embracing non-dualism, which is essentially thinking through a positive instead of normative lens. Practicing non-dualism is experiencing the world without assigning polarities.

As Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Buddhist monk who came to the United States in the 60s to spread the Dharma: "*Awakening is the ultimate disappointment for the Ego*."

If you go around telling people that you have all the answers or that you are God and they are God, there is a high likelihood that things will not end well.

"If you don't get in line, they'll lock you away." - Dave Matthews

So now that you recognize that you were not only made by just your father's balls and your mothers womb and all the steps in between, but the Universe made you, you now know that you are a piece of the Universe and therefore your thoughts and the words you speak are the Universe speaking to the Universe.

Therefore, your inner compass that subconsciously guides your decisions and forms your intuition is not just something to take for granted. The force that guides your path is already deep within you. The wisdom that is deep inside of you does not need to be found or learned, but rather uncovered beneath the layers of *Ego, Self, Somebodyness*, and the idea that we are all separate beings defined by our differences.

As a great ascetic mystic and philosopher of the 21st Century once said:

"You see it all already, trust it." - Homeless man in San Diego

And similarly, as the modern Swedish artist and musician, Jonatan Leandoer, once stated:

"So many times I've realized, what I seek for is right in front of my eyes." - Yung Lean

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So you've read up to this point: "Are you still *Here* and *Now*?"

If not, take some time to think and to return to the present moment by living in "*what is*" and not "*what was*" or "*what will be*." And always remember: "*Everything is temporary.*"

Life is a finite experience that we are all unbelievably lucky to get to experience, even with all of the suffering involved. To be as cliche as possible: just live in the present, enjoy the little things, and stop to smell the flowers.

"People never get the flowers while they can still smell them." - Kanye West

In this lifetime, given impermanence, it becomes easy to be impatient and to want to get what you want now. Not wanting to wait is a form of *aversion*. Once again: all it takes to follow your path to your highest self is to…

"Make good choices!" - Mr. Sim

Now choosing to wait to reach what you seek is a wise choice and so is making good choices about who you decide to spend your time with in this lifetime:

"Surround yourself with people whose eyes light up when they see you coming. Slowly is the fastest way to get to where you want to be. The top of one mountain is the bottom of the next, so keep climbing."
- André De Shields

"By being present in the Here and Now while following your gut, your future becomes your destiny, your dreams become your reality, and your success is defined only by your own ambitions instead of the expectations of others." - DW

Not to be confused with Machiavelli, the Italian Renaissance Philosopher, the 20th Century Makeveli once said:

"Believe in yourself and don't let nobody stop you from doing what you need to do." - Tupac Shakur

"I'm gonna do great things, great things. No, y'all can't stop my dream and my vision"
- MF DOOM & Bishop Nehru

Before reading any further, you must be willing to keep a secret. If you cannot keep a secret, this may not be for you, and could potentially make things in your life worse…

The 14th Century Persian poet, Hafez, once said:

> *"Start seeing everything as God, but keep it a secret" - Hafez*

In the same century, 14th-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said:

> *"The eye with which God is seen and through the eye through which the seeker is seeing is the same eye, one eye." - Meister Eckhart*

More recently, within the past Century, a Hindu teacher, Nisargadatta Maharaj, said:

> *"When I look inside myself and see that I am nothing, that is wisdom. When I look out and see that I am everything, that is love." And between those two my life turns." - Nisargadatta Maharaj*

By writing this, I am essentially not keeping it a secret, however, I am only telling those who I can serve and who want to serve others in some way, whether that may be by spreading joy, wisdom, love, or simply feeding those who are hungry physically or by feeding the minds of those who are hungry mentally for seeking their own truth.

On this same topic, Ram Dass' spiritual teacher, Maharaji, also known as Neem Karoli Baba once said:

> *"You can't talk to a hungry man about God. Feed him first."*

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi once said:

> *"There are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread."*

As the great Greek philosopher, Socrates, once said:

> *"All I know is I know nothing."*

As Socondees once said:

> *"You never know until you know. You know?"*

As you once said:

> *"Who's Socondees?"*

As I once said:

> *"Socondees _____"*

[*You fill in the rest*]

Now all jokes aside, life is a "*Cosmic Joke*" filled with paradoxes, punch lines, and call backs:

> *"How come the more you learn, the more you realize how much you will never know or never be able to put into words or familiar concepts?"*

This may seem counterintuitive, but it makes perfect sense. On this notion, the late 20th Century mystic philosopher, Terance McKenna once said:

> *"As the bonfires of knowledge grow brighter, the more the darkness is revealed to our startled eyes"*
> *- Terance McKenna*

Quite similarly, one of the smartest humans to ever live, Albert Einstein, once said:

> "*As our circle of knowledge expands, so does the circumference of darkness surrounding it."*
> *- Albert Einstein*

Now if you don't like paradoxical questions or aren't familiar with the Buddhist idea of "*Koans,"* it may save you lots of time and effort to know that when answering these questions, your rational mind will do you no good, you must think outside of your fixed conceptions and *choose your own conceptions of everything.*

To get at this notion, Einstein also said:

> *"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."*

> *"I never came upon any of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking." - Albert Einstein*

Now we will view some paradoxical statements that hint at the concept of the "*Ego Trap*:"

> *"I can look inside and see and know, but in doing so, I cannot be the "self" who sees and knows."*

> *"To 'wake up,' you cannot be the self who is 'awake.' You cannot be the doer who does."*

> *"Simply be consciousness, unattached to the Ego, self, body, material world, thoughts, outcomes, and this finite life or 'incarnation.'" - DW*

"How come the greatest wish you can ask for is to be so content and satisfied that you never need to wish for anything ever again?"

This is because liberation from suffering is done by not wishing, but rather by simply doing everything the exact way you wish you did them the first time; living without any "*could'ves, should'ves, and would'ves."* To encapsulate this message, a very wise and very short spiritual master from long, long ago once said:

> *"Do or do not, there is no try."*
> *"You must unlearn what you have learned."*
> *"The force is already within you."*
> *- Master Yoda*

By recognizing that we must choose our conceptions of everything ourselves, it is apparent that we can never let anyone think for us.

> *"If you end up with a boring miserable life because you listened to your mom, your dad, your teacher, your priest, or some guy on television telling you how to do your shit, then you deserve it"*
> *- Frank Zappa*
> *"Emancipate yourself from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our own minds."*
> *- Bob Marley*

Therefore, we must all think for ourselves and have trust and faith in whatever we have trust and faith in, whether that may be your gut, your instinct, your intuition, your mind, or the Universe, Mother Nature, karma, God, Allah, Jah, Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Hanuman, Brahman, Tao, the Buddha, Jesús Cristo, the Prophet Muhammad, Great Spirit, the One, the Divine, or simply ***NOTHING****.*

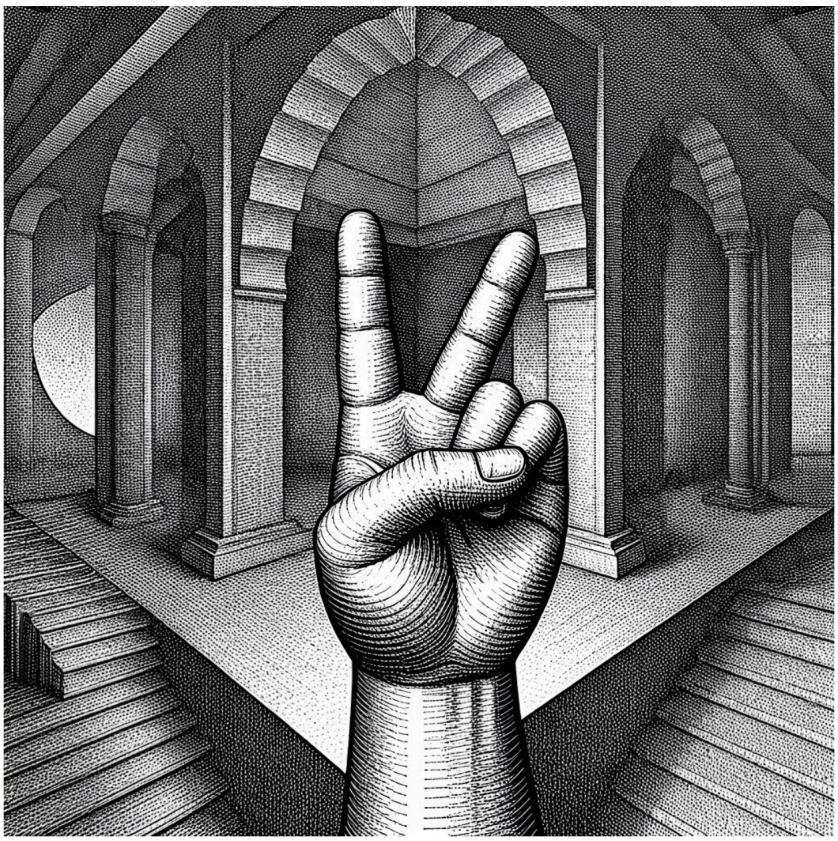
If you can choose your own conceptions and eventually see:

> *"Nothing is full of emptiness, in the same way that the glass is half full and half empty. Your 'higher power' is already 'you,' but not the idea of 'you' that you are attached to, your 'somebodyness.'*
>
> *You truly can learn to put your trust and faith into everything, everywhere, all at once, while sitting relaxed in the present and having no fixed beliefs. This is done by recognizing that the higher power is 'Within You and Without You.'" - DW*

To me, that means believing in "Nothing."

That is the way, the path, the journey, the dream, the Pura vida, it's all the same trip, it is LIFE and that is "Lifeism: The Art of Nothing." - DWDW

Now remember two things: “*Peace and Love*”



Dedicated to the creator that created my creator, my higher power: Grandma

“May God grant you the serenity to accept the things you cannot change, Courage to change the things you can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Also, dedicated to the Sakya Sujata Children Welfare Trust Primary School

“Compassion is the Root of Religion”

“Feeding 150 hungry kids may not change the world, but for those kids, the world will change.”

“Within You WIthout You” - The Beatles (1967)

We were talking about the space between us all

And the people who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion

Never glimpse the truth

Then it's far too late

When they pass away

We were talking about the love we all could share

When we find it, to try our best to hold it there with our love

With our love, we could save the world, if they only knew

Try to realise it's all within yourself

No one else can make you change

And to see you're really only very small

And life flows on within you and without you

We were talking about the love that's gone so cold

And the people who gain the world and lose their soul

They don't know

They can't see

Are you one of them?

When you've seen beyond yourself then you may find

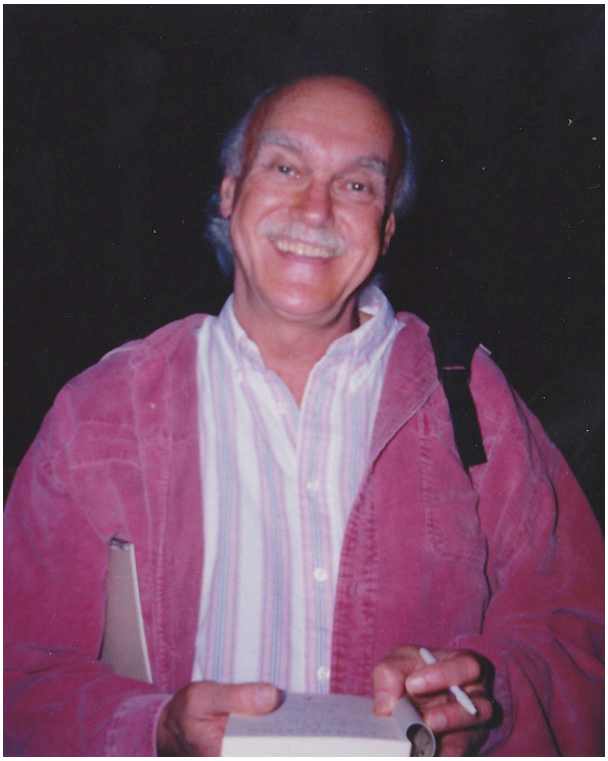
Peace of mind is waiting there

And the time will come when you see we're all one

And life flows on within you and without you

Acknowledgements and Thanks:

And most importantly, I'd like to thank my Mother and Father, my older sister and younger brother for unintentionally teaching me the "Middle Way," my best friends (you already know who you are), all of my relatives and family members for always being there for me, every teacher and professor I've ever had (even the ones I hated at the time and who may have also hated me), every person I've ever met who has shared their truth and wisdom, every musician who's ever blessed my ears, every author whose words my eyes have touched, every artist I've ever loved who speaks their truth, every film maker whose movies or videos I have learned from, each and every higher power in all forms and all formlessness, Mother Nature, every spiritual teacher, philosopher, mystic, and free speaker throughout time who has grasped at the sand of the ineffible that is beyond our human minds and thrown it in my eyes so I can see both "nothing and everything" and embrace myself and the outside world with love; to name a few, I'd like to thank Ram Dass, Timothy Leary, Alan Watts, Maharaji (Neem Karoli Baba), and most importantly, this is dedicated to all the teachers that told me I'd never amount to nothing, to all the people that lived above the buildings that I was hustlin' in front of that called the police on me when I was just tryin' to make some money to feed my [future] daughter, and all the people in the struggle… It was all a dream. - DWDW



Ram Dass, also known as Richard Alpert

(April 6th, 1931 - December 22, 2019)